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GAMA Reminds Flood Victims: Flood-Damaged Appliances Should Be Replaced, Not Repaired!

With severe flooding in the Midwest, it is important to remember that all flood-damaged plumbing, heating, cooling and electrical appliances and related systems should be replaced, rather than repaired. This warning was issued today by GAMA, the national trade association representing manufacturers of space heating and water heating equipment. The association also recommended that all work on flooded equipment be performed by qualified, licensed contractors, not by homeowners.

The GAMA warning stems from past reports of accidents resulting from improper do-it-yourself repairs of flood-damaged appliances. One homeowner, for example, suffered severe burns in a flash fire that occurred when he tried to re-light the pilot on his flooded gas water heater. The Association stresses that not only gas equipment is at risk but also units using oil or electricity as the energy source.

“Controls damaged by floodwaters are extremely dangerous,” notes GAMA President Jack W. Klimp. “Attempts to use equipment with defective gas or oil control devices can result in fires, flashbacks or explosions. And in the case of electrical appliances, the result can be injury or even death from a powerful electric shock.” The GAMA president noted that devices at risk include water heaters, furnaces, boilers, room heaters and air conditioners.

The Association stresses that the repair of flooded appliances and related systems (including damaged venting and electrical connections) is not a job for the do-it-yourselfer, no matter how skilled. This is particularly true of control valves, according to Mr. Klimp. These components are manufactured to extremely close tolerances. Once submerged in floodwaters, they must be replaced. Field repairs should never be attempted by the homeowner.

Even when controls appear to be operative, the unit should not be used after floodwaters recede. “It may work for a while,” Mr. Klimp explains, “but it will deteriorate over time. It might take a week, a month or even a year, but once any control has been under water it presents a serious hazard...fire or explosion in the case of gas controls, fire or shock in the case of electric equipment.”

Because so many things can go wrong as a result of floodwaters, it’s usually cheaper and always safer to replace rather than repair, Mr. Klimp said. “You can have a control valve replaced but there may be damage to other parts of the unit, like venting, piping, burners and insulation. There are so many things that can go wrong that the wise choice is always to start over with new equipment,” the GAMA president declared.

In some instances, government aid may be available to help consumers finance the replacement of flood-damaged heating equipment. For information, homeowners should contact any of the offices of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) set up to help flood victims.

Founded in 1935, GAMA has been an established force in the heating industry for nearly 75 years. Headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, GAMA is the national trade association representing manufacturers of gas-fired, oil-fired and electric space and water heating equipment, components and related products used for residential, commercial and industrial applications. GAMA member companies account for more than 90 percent of U.S. shipments of gas and oil-fired space heating equipment and gas, oil and electric water heaters. Combined U.S. shipments of GAMA member companies exceed \$9 billion per year. In addition, GAMA member companies employ more than 190,000 workers in the United States. GAMA’s membership reaches beyond the United States to include companies in Canada, Japan, China, Europe and Australia.

My water heater was flooded. What do I need to do?

Question

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Answer

What you will need to do depends on the type water heater you have. Please read the following letter regarding flood damaged water heaters.

Date: March 12, 2003

Subject: Flood Damaged Water Heaters

The Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association (GAMA) has determined that any residential gas appliance exposed to flooding should be replaced. The potential damages to gas controls both seen and unseen present a hazard that can only be avoided by replacement of the appliance. This is due to a number of factors including dirt and debris getting into controls, as well as corrosion of the control and other components in the combustion train. Even though appliances exposed to flooding may appear to be operational, the gradual buildup of dirt and corrosion over time can render safety devices inoperative. For the same reasons, any residential electric heater should have its components exposed to flooding replaced. As with gas controls, corrosion, dirt and debris in electric controls can interfere with proper operation and render safety devices inoperative. Recognizing that due to the financial burden of replacing more expensive commercial water heaters, and the increased likelihood that they will receive professional installation and service, such units may be serviced and put back into operation. Such service should include replacement of all parts exposed to flood waters, and be performed by one of our registered service agents or a utility service person.

Therefore, in the interest of safety, we recommend a complete replacement of flooded residential gas water heaters. Residential electric heaters may be put back into operation after replacement of the affected controls by a licensed plumber. Commercial water heaters may be put back into service only after they have had flooded components replaced by a one of our registered service agents or utility service person. We will not knowingly sell replacement parts where these conditions have not been met.

For a listing of our service agents in your area: If you are accessing this answer from our website, please submit a request through our Ask A Question page, by clicking on the Ask a Question tab and completing the e-mail request form.

01/25/2006